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POLITY

of the

Churches of God

in

NORTH AMERICA

BY

S. G. YAHN, D. D.

Editor of The Church Advocate

(SECOND EDITION)

Central Publishing House
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
1929

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INTRODUCTION

The Board of Directors of the Central Publishing House was authorized by the General Eldership of 1925 to have prepared and published "a brief handbook," covering "the principles of our church polity from the local church on up to the General Eldership." The board selected its president, the editor of *The Church Advocate,* to do this work, and the following pages are the result.

The purpose of the author is to make clear, in as brief a manner as possible, the process by which a local church is constituted and organized; the qualifications and duties of its officers; the method of exercising discipline; the principles which operate in the wider spheres of Eldership and General Eldership government; also to show the relation between local churches and the Eldership of which they are a part, the relation between the different annual Elderships and between these Elderships and the General Eldership.

In keeping with the official action of authorization, the effort was restricted to "the principles of

our church polity." The details of Eldership and General Eldership government are more fully set forth in their printed constitutions, which can be obtained by all who care to have them. As to the details of local church government, they are of much less importance than its principles; church officers who firmly grasp and clearly understand the principles which should guide them in the discharge of their official duties never go very far astray in the matter of details.

And it is in behalf of these principles, which should always govern our conduct "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," that this handbook goes out to the brotherhood as an unpretentious offering.

S. G. YAHN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHURCH AND ITS ORGANIZATION

We are to study the church with special reference to its organization and government.

The word church, in the New Testament scriptures, has a twofold application. It is used to designate the whole body of believers throughout the world, and it is also applied to the local church.

It was used in the former sense by the Master when He said (Matthew xvi. 18): "Upon this rock I will build my church." It is used in the same sense by the Apostle when he writes of the church as the body of Christ (Ephesians i. 22, 23; Colossians i. 18).

This is the church universal, composed of all Christians and Christians only. Every Christian in the world, of whatever land or affiliation is a constituent part of it, and no one else is. Regeneration is the condition of membership. Those who belong to the church universal became members of it when they were born into the family of God their Father. It is sometimes called the invisible church, for the reason that it has no officers, no meeting-place—no visible organization.

The second use of the word church is its application to local organizations, such as the church at Jerusalem (Acts viii. 1); the church at Antioch (Acts xiii. 1); the church of God at Ephesus (Acts xx. 28) and the church of God at Corinth (I. Corinthians i. 2; II. Corinthians i. 1).

The condition of membership in a local church of God is the same as the condition of membership in the church universal; namely, the new birth. There are various duties, regulations and ordinances which are to be observed by the church, but these have no essential connection with the act of admission into the church. For example, when one has become a Christian it is one's duty to unite with a local church, and also to be baptized. But there is no essential connection between these duties, neither is the discharge of either essential to the validity of the other. A Christian may unite with a local church before he is baptized, or he may be baptized before he unites with the church, or, as is often the case, he may be fellowshipped and baptized on the same occasion. This may also be said of the other ordinances and duties of the church. They are important and should be emphasized. But the

point to be kept clear is that no man is a fit subject for church membership, baptism or any other religious ordinance or duty unless he has been born again, and the moment that change takes place in his life he is qualified for church membership; for at that moment he becomes a member of the church universal, and membership in the church universal is the only condition we can require for membership in the church local. Because of his early training, or lack of training, he may have much to learn before he can observe certain ordinances and discharge certain duties intelligently, and therefore profitably. But, having been made a new creature in Christ Jesus, he should be admitted into the church, the school of Christ, in order that he may be taught what the Master expects of those who have become His disciples, or learners. And, if he be a willing learner, as all true converts are; and if the church be a faithful teacher, he will soon learn the right ways of the Lord and joyfully follow Him in all of His commandments and ordinances blameless.

What, then, is a local church of God? It is a body of believers in any given community who have voluntarily associated themselves for the purpose of religious instruction, work and wor-

ship. Winebrenner says: "A particular visible gospel church is a society of Christians united together for the celebration of the worship of God." And again, "an indefinite number of persons called out of nature into grace, and combined or united together for religious purposes."

How a Local Church is Constituted

The original church at Jerusalem was formed of the converts of Pentecost, and increased day by day by the addition of "those that were being saved." Later the apostles established churches in different places where the gospel and grace of God had given them success in winning souls. The scriptural record does not give us the details of this work. No doubt their plan was a very simple one, in keeping with the spirit and methods of primitive Christianity. Nor need the plan be elaborate now. Let us suppose that a number of believers of a common faith have come together at a meeting-place, in response to a public announcement or personal invitation. The nature, doctrines and practices of the church and the importance of its work are explained. The matter is given careful and prayerful consideration by those present. Then they agree to associate

themselves in such a fellowship, and their names are recorded as charter members. When these things are done, a church has been constituted.

For many years the "Church Record" adopted and published by the General Eldership has carried the following "Church Covenant," which makes a good heading for a church membership roll:

Church Covenant

"We, whose names are recorded in this book, members of the Church of God, do mutually and solemnly covenant and agree; for the promotion of our own happiness, the salvation of others, and the glory of God; to unite in church fellowship, to live in Christian peace and love, and to walk or live, according to the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, as he hath revealed the same to us in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; which contain, as we believe, the only authoritative rule of Christian faith and practice.

"And, moreover, we do solemnly promise, patiently to submit to the order of God's house; that is to say, to the government and discipline of His church; and also cheerfully obey the rulers

or office-bearers, who are, or at any time may be, placed over us in the Lord."

How a Local Church is Organized

This church, so constituted, in order that its work may be carried on in an orderly and successful manner, should next be organized by the selection of the proper officers. Paul says that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (I. Corinthians xii. 28). And in writing to the Romans (xii. 4-8) Paul speaks of "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us," including prophesying, ministering, teaching, exhorting and ruling.

Very early in the history of the church, in order that the Apostles might be relieved from certain temporal duties, "the multitude of the disciples" selected seven deacons (Acts vi. 1-6).

We also read that Paul and Barnabas, on their extended missionary journey, "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts xiv. 23). And Paul told Titus, his son in the faith, that he left him in Crete to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city" (Titus i. 5).

Thus we have quite a list of what appears to be officers in the church. But it is evident that some of these were only temporary. This is pre-eminently so of the apostolate. The Apostles had no successors. This was the formative period of the church, characterized by certain temporary officers, as well as certain temporary and extra-ordinary gifts, like those of "miracles," and "tongues."

Moreover, some of these classifications do not refer to different orders of officers in the church, but only to the exercise of different functions by the same order. When we now speak of the minister, preacher, pastor and evangelist we do not designate four different orders of offices in the church, but simply four different functions of the same order. So it was in the early church.

Passing from the formative period to the time when churches had been established and their organization perfected, we find two, and only two, permanent offices in the church—those of elders and deacons.

Since succeeding generations would have nothing to do with that which was only temporary in the church, it was not necessary that the qualifications of such officers should be minutely recorded.

But it was manifestly important that the qualifications of all permanent officers should be clearly set forth. Hence it is significant that the Apostle gives the qualifications of two orders only—elders and deacons. Had it been the divine will that any other order should have continued permanently in the church, the qualifications therefor would undoubtedly have been given.

These two officers are mentioned, and they only. We read of elders in Acts xiv. 23; xx. 17; Titus i. 5; James v. 14; and I. Peter v. 1. In I. Timothy iii. 1-15, we have the qualifications of both bishops and deacons. And Paul addresses his epistle to the Philippians "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Philippians i. 1). In this he evidently includes the whole church at Philippi, with all its officers.

It is in order at this point to state that the words "bishop" and "elder" are used in the scriptures interchangeably. This is evident from three facts:

1. That only two orders of officers are mentioned in any New Testament church. We read of elders and deacons in the church at Jerusalem (Acts vi. 1-6; xv. 4), and of bishops and deacons

in the church at Philippi (Philippians i. 1; but we do not read of bishops, elders and deacons in any church.

2. When Paul was at Miletus, "he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church." And during their interview, while giving them counsel, he called them "overseers," or bishops, for such is the meaning of the word, and it is translated bishops in the Revised Version (Acts xx. 17-28).

3. Paul instructed Titus to "ordain elders in every city" in Crete, and immediately gave the qualifications of an elder under the name of bishop (Titus i. 5-9). And the same qualifications which he mentioned to Titus for elders he also wrote to Timothy, using the title "bishop" (I. Timothy iii. 1-7).

Thus we have two permanent orders of officers in the church, with a proper classification and division of labor.

The manner in which these officers were chosen is not stated. The word "ordain" does not imply any particular form or method, but simply means that they were chosen, as the word itself indicates. Our usual method is to elect them by ballot at a

congregational meeting, publicly called for that purpose.

The number of officers that a church should have is not determined by the scriptures, except that we read of a plurality of elders and deacons (Acts vi. 3; xi. 30; xiv. 23; xx. 17; Philippians i. 1; Titus i. 5; James v. 14; and I. Peter v. 1). Hence, there should be at least two elders and two deacons, and may be more of each if required by the size and needs of the church.

As to the tenure of office, the scriptures are also silent. This leaves the matter to be determined by the church. And the prevailing custom among the Churches of God is to elect officers annually.

CHAPTER II.

QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES OF LOCAL CHURCH OFFICIALS

The qualifications of elders and deacons are clearly and concisely set forth in the first twelve verses of the third chapter of Paul's First Epistle to Timothy. While he expressed the hope of visiting Timothy shortly, Paul tells him that he wrote these things so "if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." After magnifying the office by the statement that "if a man desireth the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," he continues by saying:

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest

being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." To these may be added the qualifications set forth in Acts vi. 3. When "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them" to suggest a plan by which they might be relieved from serving tables in order that they might give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word," they said: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

It will add to the clearness of these qualifica-

tions if we restate them in consecutive order and number them.

An elder must be (1) blameless; (2) the husband of one wife; (3) vigilant; (4) sober; (5) of good behavior; (6) given to hospitality; (7) apt to teach; (8) not given to wine; (9) no striker; (10) not greedy of filthy lucre; (11) patient; (12) not a brawler; (13) not covetous; (14) one that ruleth well his own house; (15) not a novice; (16) he must have a good report of them which are without.

A deacon must be (1) grave; (2) not double-tongued; (3) not given to much wine; (4) not greedy of filthy lucre; (5) holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience; (6) blameless; (7) the husband of one wife; (8) ruling his children and his own house well; (9) a man of honest report; (10) full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

It will be noticed that of the sixteen qualifications mentioned for elders and ten for deacons, six are similar; numbers 1, 2, 8, 10, 14, and 16 of elders correspond to 6, 7, 3, 4, 8 and 9, of deacons.

Though qualifications 1, 2, 5 and 10, of deacons are not mentioned with those of elders, they are evidently implied in the qualifications of the latter. Both elders and deacons must be regenerated

men. Elders must be "holy" (Titus i. 8), and deacons "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts vi. 3).

While the purpose for which deacons were selected implies that they should be men of business ability, it does not follow that elders are lacking in such ability. It was not for want of financial ability on the part of the Apostles that deacons were chosen, but because the former had more important work with which to employ their time (Acts vi. 2-4).

But there are two qualifications for elders which are not required for deacons—the ability to teach, and to oversee, or rule. Elders must be "apt to teach" (I. Timothy iii. 2) and "able....to exhort" (Titus i. 9), and the title "bishop" implies the ability to oversee, care for and control the flock.

Morally, the qualifications of elders and deacons are the same; intellectually, they differ. The difference is not in what they are, but in what they can do; a difference of ability, not of character.

The two special qualifications of elders just mentioned, and the purpose for which deacons were originally chosen (Acts vi. 1-4), point out their respective duties.

Duties of Elders

1. They are to teach. This is evident from the fact that Paul gives as one of the qualifications of elders that they be "apt to teach" (I. Timothy iii. 2). And in writing to Titus on this subject, where he gives substantially the same qualifications for elders as he gave to Timothy, Paul adds this: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus i. 9). And that some of the elders, at least, were laborers in the word and doctrine is evident from this instruction given by Paul to Timothy: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (I. Timothy v. 17).

2. They are to oversee. This was the responsibility which Paul pointed out to the elders of the church at Ephesus when he talked with them at Miletus: "Take heed therefore," said he, "unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts xx. 28). Peter discusses the

same subject, in practically the same way, when he says: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I. Peter v. 1-4).

3. They are to rule. This is a necessary part of the work of overseeing, as noted above. They are to rule, not as "lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." We have noticed that Paul wrote to Timothy about "elders that rule well," and that he gave as one of the qualifications for an elder to rule in the church that he be able to rule well his own house (I. Timothy iii. 4, 5; v. 17).

Paul evidently had the same thought in mind when, in writing to the Thessalonians, he said: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very

highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (I. Thessalonians v. 12, 13).

The Hebrews were exhorted on this subject as follows: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. . . . Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. . . . Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints" (Hebrews xiii. 7, 8, 17, 24).

Government is absolutely necessary in order that the work of the church may be prosecuted in an orderly and successful manner. This implies the exercise of authority, and requires two classes—those who "rule" and those who "obey." Both of these are clearly mentioned in the foregoing scriptures, and it is equally clear that the elders are the officers who are to rule. It is their duty, not to make laws, but to enforce those given by divine inspiration. They are the government

of the church, or the officers through whom that government is made operative. They are the representatives of the church. They act on the reception of members into the church, on all matters pertaining to their spiritual welfare that may require attention or action while they are in the church, and, if necessary, on their dismissal or expulsion from the church.

These three functions—teaching, overseeing and ruling—cover all that belongs to the moral discipline, or spiritual affairs, of the church; and in these matters the elders are the divinely authorized officers.

Teaching and Ruling Elders

All elders were to both teach and rule: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God" (Hebrews xiii. 7). Naturally some became more proficient as teachers than others. This seems to have been the case in Paul's day, who said to Timothy, "let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (I. Timothy v. 17). Naturally those of superior teaching ability developed into what we call ministers. It is on

this ground that we have divided elders into two classes—teaching elders and ruling elders. These are not two orders of officers, but simply two classes of one order. Both classes teach and rule, the difference being that with ministers, or teaching elders, the teaching function is primary and the ruling function secondary; while with ruling elders the relative importance of these functions is reversed. And there may have been a temporary order of preachers, or evangelists, like Timothy and Titus, as a kind of connecting link between the Apostles and the ministry that developed from the elders who were "apt to teach."

The relation between the teaching elder, as pastor, and the ruling elders of the church to which he ministers should be one of mutual confidence and close fellowship. The pastor should consult with the elders and the elders should assist the pastor in all the spiritual affairs of the church, in visiting the sick and the wayward, and in everything that will promote the cause of Christ.

The attitude of church members toward the pastor and the other officials of the church should be one of liberal support and hearty co-operation. Their financial support should be sufficient to

relieve the pastor of temporal cares and enable him to devote himself wholly to the ministry of the word—to the winning of souls and the upbuilding of the church. For "so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (I. Corinthians ix. 14). And church members should regard their officials with confidence and respect, and cheerfully submit to all due authority which they may exercise over the church. Or, as Paul expressed it (I. Thessalonians v. 12, 13), "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." And again: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews xiii. 17).

Duties of Deacons

The purpose for which deacons were originally selected was the distribution of support, and especially of assistance to the poor. The occasion

arose in the original church at Jerusalem, and is thus described in Acts vi. 1-4:

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

It will be recalled that the church at Jerusalem had a community of goods; that they "had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts ii. 44, 45). Naturally dissatisfaction arose. In this particular case it was with reference to the support of widows. The management of these temporal affairs also involved a great deal of responsibility and required considerable time. It was taking more than a reasonable amount of the time of the apostles—

time which properly belonged to their primary and most important work, "the ministry of the word." So they called "the multitude of the disciples" together and directed that they select seven men to attend to "this business."

This was the character of their work, and it justifies the assumption that they were "deacons" —servants who ministered in supplying temporal needs—as the title implies. The apostles thereafter gave their attention exclusively to the spiritual interests of the church, while the deacons looked after the temporal affairs.

Conditions in some respects have greatly changed. There is nothing in the church of today which corresponds to the early church's plan for a community of goods (a plan which seems to have caused a good deal of confusion), and hence there are no such responsibilities as the first deacons had to assume. But there is still a fragment of this kind of work for the deacons, to the extent that a church endeavors to provide for its poor. In addition to this it is the duty of the deacons to look after all financial matters, including the incidental expenses of the church, the pastor's salary, the temporal preparations for the observ-

ance of the ordinances, and, unless delegated to trustees, the care of the church property.

This exception is mentioned because many of our local churches have trustees, who are incorporated, and in whom the title to the church property is vested. In other cases the title is held in trust by the Eldership of which the local church is a part. Where a church has trustees, it is their duty to care for the church property. Their authority and duties are defined in their charter, or articles of incorporation, the same having first been submitted to and approved by the church for which they are to act as trustees. It is customary for trustees to look after ordinary matters on their own responsibility. But questions of more importance, involving greater expense and not requiring haste, should be submitted to the church for its decision.

It seems probable from several texts that there were also deaconesses in at least some of the apostolic churches. This is a justifiable inference from the mention of qualifications for women, given in connection with the qualifications for deacons. Along with the qualifications for deacons, we find Paul saying: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in

all things." The Revised Version renders it: "Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things" (I. Timothy iii. 11).

In writing to the Romans Paul says: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also" (Romans xvi. 1, 2). The margin of the Revised Version has "deaconess" instead of "servant." It is probable, also, that the women who labored with Paul in the church at Philippi were of the same class (Philippians iv. 3).

But these women were not a separate order of church officers. They were a part of the diaconate, with duties similar to those of the deacons, which they could attend to among the female members of the church with more propriety than the deacons could, such as ministering to the sick and the poor, collecting funds, assisting women in baptism, and in the administration of the ordinance of the washing of the saints' feet (I. Timothy v. 10).

Thus it is seen that the church of God in New Testament times had but two permanent orders of officers (elders and deacons), with some classification and division of labor. The elders were to look after the church's spiritual interests and the deacons had charge of its temporal affairs. The work of the elders was more important than that of the deacons, in the sense that the spiritual is more important than the temporal. For this reason they are mentioned more frequently in the scriptures and were required to have superior qualifications.

The fact that their duties are distinct might suggest that they should have their separate organizations and meetings. Thus each church would have its board of elders and its board of deacons. And in matters which involve an overlapping of duties they could meet jointly, and this joint meeting would properly constitute the church council. But, probably because there are so many matters in which there is an overlapping of the spiritual and the temporal, it is the custom of most of the churches of God to hold council meetings only, in the discussions and the decisions of which both the elders and the deacons participate. The pastor of the church, by virtue of his

position, is a member of this council and is classed with the elders.

Church officers should make a report at the annual congregational meeting, as do the boards and committees of other organizations.

On a circuit of two or more churches, questions of common interest naturally arise which require mutual consideration and concurrent action. For this purpose a joint council meeting is held at a suitable time and place. When the several councils meet they organize by the election of a president and a secretary, and proceed to transact business in the usual way.

CHAPTER III.

DISCIPLINE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

No duty of the local church is more delicate or difficult than that of discipline.

Church discipline is not, as many seem to think, a system of rules or laws by the enforcement of which offending members are expelled from the church. It is rather a governmental control by which such members are corrected in conduct and restored in fellowship in order that they may consistently remain in the church. This is its primary purpose, as the meaning of the word "discipline" indicates; expulsion from the church is a function to be exercised only as a last resort, in exceptional cases.

This is evident from the preliminary steps required by the Master before it is in order for the church to begin to exercise discipline. In Matthew xviii. 15-17, he says:

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three

witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

This, primarily, covers all cases of estrangement between two or more members of the church—a condition which militates against their individual spiritual life and their brotherly fellowship in the work of the Lord. All such conditions should be corrected, and the Master has given us, in the scripture just quoted, the only effective method by which wrongs can be made right.

The first thing is for the estranged parties to get together. And the Lord has laid upon the innocent party the responsibility for taking the initiative. This is contrary to human nature, which accounts for the familiar remark, "He is the one who did the wrong and it is his duty to come to me." But the divine nature is just the reverse. It manifests the spirit of the innocent Christ who came to the guilty sinner—a plan without which none of us would have been saved. And it is the same Christ who in substance says, If your brother does you a wrong, you, the innocent party, should go to him, the guilty party,

and "tell him his fault." This should be done by you two alone with your God. It is reasonable to assume that the innocent party is in a better frame of mind and heart than the guilty party, and hence better fitted to take the initiative in seeking a reconciliation. Moreover, the whole matter may be a misunderstanding, the accused brother may not have done any wrong whatever, and hence is wholly ignorant of any estrangement which needs to be made right. All this shows the divine wisdom in having the first step taken by the one who feels that he has been wronged. And when this is done in the true Christian spirit it will, in nearly all cases, produce the proper result and the trouble will end in a blessed restoration of brotherly fellowship.

If not, the second step in the divine plan requires the innocent party to go back again, this time taking with him one or two others, that there may be witnesses of what transpires at the conference, and also that they may assist him in his efforts toward a reconciliation. Here, as before, the spirit of Christ should control, and the main object, that of gaining the erring brother, should be kept constantly in mind. For we should never lose sight of the significant fact that this scripture

which we are considering immediately follows the parable of the lost sheep, and the words of the Master, "even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

If this second effort ends in failure, then, but not till then, is the aggrieved party privileged to "tell it unto the church." This means that he can bring the matter before the church council, which, in its representative capacity, functions in the government of the church.

The church council should carefully guard against the mistake of allowing any one to bring such a matter before it who has not first taken the two preliminary steps just referred to, as required by the Master's teaching. It requires a good deal of moral courage to take these steps, and hence the temptation to ignore them and carry one's case immediately to the church council. This the council should never allow. The Lord's object is evidently to keep as many of these unfortunate affairs outside the official circle of the church as possible, and we can only hope for His blessing when we follow His teaching. As in civil affairs, so in religious affairs: the larger number of cases settled "out of court," the better.

The first and second steps should be taken in the hope of avoiding the third.

After the aggrieved party has gone alone to the one who has trespassed against him, and then with one or two others with him, without avail, he can bring the matter to the attention of the church council in an informal manner; that is, for the council to have both parties meet for a conference in the council's presence, the latter to use its "good offices" in effecting a reconciliation without taking official action.

The church council is designated for the reason that, while this is properly the duty of the elders, it has become a general custom among us, as stated in the preceding chapter, to have all matters considered by the council and acted on jointly by both elders and deacons. However, in any case where the board of elders and the board of deacons are separately organized, each board should confine itself to the duties listed under its own heading.

Discipline Under Charges

If, however, the aggrieved party decides to prefer charges, this is his privilege, he having taken the preliminary steps laid down in Matthew xviii. 15, 16.

This should be done in a careful and regular manner. Whatever the trespassing brother has done, or is alleged to have done, should be fully and clearly stated. That statement is the *charge*. Under this charge should be stated the *specifications,* setting forth, as definitely as possible, the time, place and circumstances of the alleged offense, with the names of the witnesses by whom the charge is to be substantiated. If there is more than one charge, each should be stated in a similar manner, along with its specifications. The charges should be presented to the church council and an exact copy furnished to the accused.

Having received the charges, the council will designate the time and place of trial and notify the parties concerned accordingly, usually giving the defendant at least ten days in which to prepare for his defense. A second citation should be issued to the accused person who fails to respond to the first.

When the day arrives, the trial is conducted in the usual way. The prosecutor and the defendant, either or both, may be represented by an "attorney," or, they can conduct the case themselves. Each is entitled to witnesses, the same to be subject to examination and cross-examina-

tion. If an "attorney" is selected he must be a minister or layman of the church, for the reason that the case is being tried before an ecclesiastical court, not a civil or criminal court.

The council acts as judge and jury. It interprets the law, hears the evidence, and renders the verdict, either at the close of the trial or at a later date which it may fix. This verdict ends the matter, unless an appeal be taken to the Standing Committee of the Eldership of which the local church is a part. This process of appeal is more fully explained in a later chapter.

If the accused is found guilty, the penalty may be admonition, reproof, censure, suspension or expulsion, as the gravity of the offense and the attitude of the offender, may warrant. This penalty is imposed by the church council, unless it be stayed by an appeal to the higher ecclesiastical court.

Discipline Without Charges

Lapses of conduct develop among church members which need to be dealt with by the direct effort and action of the church council. No one prefers charges, because the wrongs in question are not against any particular individual but

against the church and the Christian cause in general. The condition requires correction, on the ground that when one member (the erring one) suffers, the whole body suffers.

These grounds of church discipline may, broadly speaking, be grouped under three heads:

1. Immorality, including all moral lapses in the character and conduct of church members which not only discredit themselves but also bring a reproach on the church to which they belong.

2. Heresy, or the teaching of anything which conflicts with the fundamental or distinctive doctrines of the Churches of God and therefore has a tendency to cause confusion among those who should speak the same things and be of the same mind.

3. Schismatic influences on the part of those who, though morally clean and doctrinally sound, pursue a course which is likely to cause division in the church.

In all such cases as these it is not in order to carry out the *letter* of the scripture which we have had under consideration (Matthew xviii. 15, 16). That is to say, these persons need not be visited to effect a reconciliation, as in the former case, because there is no estrangement; the offense is

not against any particular individual, but against the whole church. But the *spirit* of that scripture should be fully carried out. These erring ones should be visited by the pastor and the elders and reasoned with and admonished and every possible effort made to restore them and save them for Christ and the church. "Brethren," said the apostle (Galatians vi. 1), "if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

If it becomes necessary, because of the failure of these efforts, to bring them before the church council, they should be given written notice of the complaints against them and the usual time of ten days to prepare to meet the issue. When they appear, the council should give every evidence of its desire to save them to the church, and only after every such effort has failed is the council justified in expelling them. In this, as in the former case, an appeal can be taken to the higher court.

One of the figures most frequently used in the Scriptures to represent the church is that of the human body, and it is very impressive and instructive in the matter of church discipline. When a member of the physical body becomes infected,

every possible effort should be made to restore that member to a healthy condition, in order that the body may remain complete. And, with the great progress of the years in medicine and surgery, the extent to which such restoration can be accomplished is remarkable. But, notwithstanding all medical skill and means, cases are encountered in which the only hope of saving the rest of the patient's body and his life is by amputating the diseased member, and this is done.

In like manner we should deal with members of the church who need disciplinary treatment. Every possible effort should be made to save them and restore them to their former condition of soul health. But, as in dealing with the physical body, cases will be encountered in which this cannot be done. In such cases but one thing remains, that of expulsion; and true church officials will never lack the moral courage to discharge this most difficult duty, that the church's life may be maintained true and strong.

But in all cases of expulsion from the church, the subsequent duty of trying to win them back to God should not be neglected; for this should certainly be our attitude toward the heathen and

the publican, with whom expelled members of the church are classed.

The foregoing covers the course of local church discipline in a general way, subject to such variations of detail as may be necessary in order to adapt it to specific cases. The main thing is to have the right spirit, and, guided by this, those who are charged with the responsibilities of church discipline will not go far astray. Church officials, therefore, should constantly seek the spirit of the One who came "not to destroy men's lives but to save them;" the One who restored the fallen apostle on the shore of Galilee with heavenly love; the One who always says to the repentant sinner, "Go, and sin no more."

CHAPTER IV.

POLITY OF THE ANNUAL ELDERSHIPS

What has been said in the preceding chapters pertains wholly to the polity of the local church—to its organization, its officers, its government and its discipline.

This was the extent of church organization in New Testament times. And our people, in the very early years of their work, striving for "the restoration of primitive Christianity" and taking the Scriptures as their "only rule of faith and practice," had no thought of any wider organization. This will explain why Winebrenner, in his "Brief View of the Formation, Government and Discipline of the Church of God," published in 1829, confined himself wholly to the government of the local church and expressed himself as an opponent of ecclesiastical organizations above the local church.

But it was Winebrenner who, in 1830, brought the ministers of the churches together in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and organized the first annual Eldership. It was called the "General Eldership," in distinction from the Elderships, or boards of

elders of the local churches. Later the name was changed to the East Pennsylvania Eldership. And it was Winebrenner who, fifteen years later, (in 1845) was chiefly instrumental in bringing ministerial and lay delegates from the East Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Pennsylvania Elderships to the city of Pittsburgh, where they organized the General Eldership. This is sufficient to show that Winebrenner had become a proponent of ecclesiastical organizations. It was the transition period of his life, and was marked by a change of views, such changes as gradually and naturally grew out of the development of his thought and work, and the needs of this work as they appeared from time to time.

It was felt then, as we fully realize now, that the local churches of a given territory need some kind of an organization for united effort, an organization which can do better for them in certain things than they could do for themselves, and by which they can carry on enterprises which they could not promote successfully by acting separately. These organizations were called Elderships because they were originally composed entirely of elders—ministers and laymen, the for-

mer being teaching elders and the latter ruling elders.

This brings us to the consideration of the subject of church polity as it operates in the larger organization of local churches into a religious body. Broadly speaking, there are three forms of church government among Protestants:

1. The Presbyterial, or government by presbyters, or elders.

2. The Congregational, by which each congregation controls its own affairs, independent of all other congregations and of any superior authority.

3. The Episcopal, or government by bishops.

Our church government is not, strictly speaking, analogous to that of the Presbyterian denomination. The Presbyterians have three ecclesiastical bodies above the local church—the Presbytery, the Synod and the General Assembly, while we have but two—the Eldership and the General Eldership. They have the call system between pastors and churches, while our pastors are appointed to the churches by the Elderships. It is true that we have always spoken of having the presbyterial form of church government, because ours, like theirs, was a government by

presbyters, or elders. But by action of the General Eldership of 1921 the lay representation in that body, as well as in the annual Elderships is no longer confined to elders; other persons, including both men and women, are eligible. So it would hardly seem proper to continue to speak of ours as a presbyterial form of government, or government by elders. Neither do we have the congregational form of government, for our local churches, as we shall see later, are subject to the authority of the annual Elderships and the General Eldership. And while our churches receive their pastors by appointment of the Eldership, as churches of the Methodist and certain other denominations receive their pastors by appointment of the conference, we, unlike these denominations, have no bishops. From this brief glance it will be seen that our church polity is a combination of principles and provisions to be found in different religious bodies, but not in any one of them in exactly the same combination. It is the product of a selective process designed to meet our needs as a religious body. And that it has served this purpose satisfactorily is a tribute to those who formed our first ecclesiastical organizations.

The Service Which an Eldership Renders to the Churches

The principal part of this service pertains to the ministry—the most important single element in the great cause of Christianity. The Eldership—

1. Selects the ministry for the churches. It is by the Eldership, through its proper board or committee, that those who feel called of God to preach are examined, conducted through a course of studies, and, if found worthy and capable, invested with the authority and responsibility of the sacred calling by a solemn ordination to the gospel ministry.

2. Provides pastors for the churches. From the ministers selected as just indicated, pastors are appointed by the Eldership to the various churches. These churches, in their annual congregational meetings held shortly before the meeting of the Eldership, express by vote their preference as to a pastor. This vote is for the information of the Eldership, or its appropriate committee, usually called a Stationing Committee, and is to be considered as a request, to be complied with, if practicable. But this may not always be

wise, and in some cases is impossible. So the final authority in the appointment of pastors is vested in the Eldership, to whose actions the churches should loyally adhere as an essential element of their genuine co-operation.

3. Functions in the discipline of ministers. Ministers are amenable for their moral and official conduct to the Eldership with which they are identified. If there is a moral lapse or an official irregularity or offense it is the right and the duty of the Eldership, or its Standing Committee in the interim between the meetings of the Eldership, to exercise discipline. This may be done with or without charges, in substantially the same way as outlined in a preceding chapter for the discipline of a lay member of a local church by its official board. When guilt is confessed or established, the penalty should be in keeping with the gravity of the offense. The offending minister may be admonished, reproved, censured, suspended definitely or indefinitely, or expelled from the ministry. The latter penalty (expulsion) the Eldership reserves to itself; the other penalties may be imposed by the Standing Committee, in the interim, as well as by the Eldership in its annual session.

4. Aids in local church discipline. In the discipline of ministers the Eldership is the court of original jurisdiction. But it also functions as a court of appeal in matters of local church discipline. If either party in a case of local church discipline or difficulty is not satisfied with the decision of the church council, an appeal can be taken to the Eldership or its Standing Committee. This higher court to which an appeal is taken can either affirm or reverse the decision of the church council, with such instruction as the case, in its judgment, may seem to require. This ends the matter unless, by the same process, an appeal is taken from the decision of the annual Eldership to the General Eldership.

5. Assists the weaker churches financially. This the Eldership does by appropriating missionary money to supplement the pastoral salaries paid by weak churches and church extension funds to aid in the building of houses of worship. This is one of our most important lines of endeavor, the movement by which weak churches are built up and our borders extended by establishing churches in new places. And it is through the Eldership as an organization, and its board of missions and board of church extension, that this

work is systematized and made effective. It is in these ways that the Eldership renders its principal service to the churches.

And what service do the churches render to the Eldership? This question betrays a distinction between the churches and the Eldership which is more imaginary than real. The work of the Eldership is the work of the churches. The Eldership, composed of the pastors and representatives of the churches, with its boards and committees, is simply the organized ecclesiastical machinery through which the churches operate. The churches produce the prospective ministers for the Eldership to examine, ordain and appoint. They provide the funds for the Eldership to appropriate. They furnish the personnel without which the Eldership could not exist and the co-operation without which it could not function. The Eldership, as the whole, is vested by the churches composing it with a greater authority than any one of its parts. In this way the churches are able to carry on their work for "the greatest good to the greatest number." The Eldership is not something separate and apart from the churches. It is their own established and recognized organization by which they govern

themselves and through which they support their enterprises and promote their activities.

The annual Elderships (unless State laws do not permit) are chartered, usually in the names of the officers and certain boards or committees and their successors in office, so as to give them a legal standing. These charters are usually wide in their latitude, permitting the Elderships to adopt their own constitutions, by-laws, rules and regulations as they may think wise, provided they do not conflict with the constitution or the laws of the United States or the State in which the Eldership is located. These rules and regulations are published in full by the different Elderships in their respective constitutions and by-laws, which are available to those who desire a more detailed account of the government of any particular Eldership.

In some cases the Eldership holds title to local church properties in trust for the respective churches, especially where local churches are not incorporated. In other cases the property is held by local trustees, with the customary reversion clause in the deed, to the effect that "in case the church should become extinct, or cease to maintain an organization in harmony with the doc-

trines, customs and polity of the Churches of God in North America, it shall become the property of the Eldership." It is generally held, however, that even without such a reversion clause in the deed, in case the local church becomes extinct, or ceases to maintain an organization as just indicated, the property naturally and properly goes to the larger religious body of which the local church was a part.

While speaking of property titles and the legal affairs of local churches, it seems pertinent to suggest that no church property should be purchased without employing a competent attorney to examine the title and prepare or approve the deed. A few dollars spent at the beginning may save the trouble and greater expense of trying to correct mistakes later on. The old adage, "penny wise and pound foolish," has probably had more exemplification in connection with church properties than in any other sphere.

It is in order, also, to repeat the familiar fact that the civil law carefully guards all church properties for the purpose for which they were originally established, taking into account the doctrines, practices and polity of the Church. This means, from our own viewpoint as a religious

body, that if a factional contest for the possession of a property arises in a local church, the law will award the property to that part of the church which is true to our doctrines and practices and loyal to our polity or government. This holds good, no difference how small a minority that part of the church may be. And, if there is none true and loyal, the property goes to the larger body (the Eldership) of which the local church was a part, the proceeds to be used elsewhere for the purpose for which the church was originally established. In reaching a conclusion in such a case the court does not inquire whether the doctrines, practices and polity of a Church are wise or unwise. The religious liberty of our country leaves that question wholly with the Church itself. The court extends its inquiry only far enough to ascertain what the doctrines, practices and polity of the Church in question are, and renders its decision accordingly.

CHAPTER V.

POLITY OF THE GENERAL ELDERSHIP

It is the purpose of this chapter to deal more fully with the fundamental principles of ecclesiastical government. These principles have their most comprehensive application and operation in the General Eldership, our highest ecclesiastical authority, hence it is fitting that they should be discussed in this connection. At the same time it should be remembered that they are also applicable to the narrower governmental spheres of the annual Eldership and the local church.

Fundamental Principles of Church Polity

Polity, as we have seen, is the form or constitution by which an organization is governed. And government implies control by the exercise of authority and the administration of laws.

This indicates that the General Eldership, and also the annual Elderships, are legislative as well as co-operative. If there were no interests except those which are strictly identified with the local churches, an annual Eldership would not need to be more than a convention for the discussion, in an advisory manner, of the best plans and

methods for local church activities. But very early in our history church extension work was undertaken in which all the local churches were interested and to the support of which they contributed. This enterprise required management beyond the plans of local church work. It became necessary for the Elderships to adopt rules and regulations, and to make them mandatory to an extent sufficient to prevent confusion and promote the work. The same necessity is created by every other enterprise which is more general than the restricted limits of the local church. And even the matter of co-operation requires a certain amount of legislation for its successful promotion.

The same principles are applicable to the General Eldership. In the early days, when we had no publishing plant, and no college, and when all of our work was missionary work, it is easy to understand why the General Eldership was more co-operative in character and less legislative than it can be under present conditions. Now we have extensive publishing and educational interests, and specific departments of missionary work, all of which are under the direction of the General Eldership, and for the control and promotion

of which certain rules and regulations are needed.

Every organization must have laws. The General Eldership is an organization. Hence it must have laws for its proper government. It is true that our work will be in vain unless we are bound together by the ties of spiritual unity. It is also true that spiritual unity cannot be produced by human laws. It must be begotten of God. But these laws are necessary to protect the unity which God produces, by restraining us from doing the things which might destroy it.

Since, therefore, the General Eldership must have laws for its proper control and the management of its interests, from whence shall these laws come? We answer, from the General Eldership itself. But what about the Bible as our law? So far as furnishing laws for religious organizations is concerned, the Bible does not go beyond the local church. The Bible record, which tells of the officers and government of the local church, does not extend to any wider organizations, because there were none. All such organizations as our annual Elderships and the General Eldership are post-apostolic. They are human organizations, made necessary by the growth of the Church. Now, since these are man-made

organizations, they must be controlled by man-made laws. The laws of the General Eldership must be the result of its own voice and vote as expressed by the majority. These laws must not only be made, but they must also be changed from time to time. Such changes are required, not necessarily by the mistakes of the past, but by the growth of the present.

Fundamentally our present Constitution is the same as that adopted by the first General Eldership in 1845. Its germinant principles, however, have been growing in proportion to the growth of the General Eldership. Amendments have been adopted from time to time in order to more clearly define and apply the principles of the Constitution.

The first Article of the Constitution defines the General Eldership to be the "general and associated body of the ministers and people of the annual Elderships."

This Article was amended by the General Eldership of 1905, as follows:

"The provisions of this Constitution shall be considered as a form or plan of government of a general character, and they shall be construed so as to extend to annual Elderships, churches,

societies and individual members within the bounds of the General Eldership."

This amendment simply states in plainer words the principle embodied in the original Article. The General Eldership, in framing and adopting a Constitution, made a law for itself. Since it consists "of the ministers and people of the annual Elderships," its law must extend to each of its constituent parts. "The ministers and people" sustain relations to local churches and to annual Elderships, and in these relations they must be governed by the laws governing these bodies; but they also sustain certain relations to the General Eldership, in which they, as well as annual Elderships, churches and societies, must submit to its general government.

In doing so they are submitting to a government which they, "the ministers and people," through their regularly elected representatives, have made for themselves. A pure democracy, in which the whole body of people meet to make the laws, has never been possible except among limited classes. The next best thing that a people can do is to elect representatives to make laws for them. Such laws are, therefore, of their own

making: for "what you do by your authorized agent you do yourself."

The Constitution of a body is its supreme and fundamental law. But it is only the framework. So the various actions of the General Eldership are parts of its laws, as well as its Constitution, and both must "extend to annual Elderships, churches, societies and individual members within the bounds of the General Eldership."

Relation of the Elderships to the General Eldership.

While the provisions of the Constitution of the General Eldership "extend to annual Elderships, churches, societies, and individual members within the bounds of the General Eldership," the most emphasis is placed on the annual Elderships. There are reasons for this. The annual Elderships are the most important organizations within the bounds of the General Eldership. It is from them that delegates are sent to constitute the General Eldership. And, when the General Eldership finds it necessary to extend the provisions of its Constitution to other organizations or individual members, it generally does so through the annual Elderships to which they belong.

How to adjust the questions of centralized power and individual liberty is a perplexing problem, as shown by the many kinds of civil government and church polity.

In our own country, the first "Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union Between the States" formed but "a rope of sand." They who had cultivated a hatred for kings were slow to consent to any centralizing of authority. "In their anxiety to be without a master, they left themselves without a government."

The Congress, being unable to assess or collect taxes (this being wholly with the States), could command no confidence in its credit. The Federal Government, in short, "was despised abroad and disobeyed at home." The Confederation failed because it lacked the power that a general government must have.

This condition led to a convention which framed the Constitution of the United States, giving to the General Government the power to enforce its laws, not only in a general way, but also in and over the States.

But sometimes it is said that the States formed the general government, instead of the general government forming the States. From this view-

point erroneous conclusions are drawn. What are the facts? The original States, of necessity, formed the general government. But how? "By conceding to it the essentials of sovereignty." Since then the general government alone can establish a State, and all subsequent States are products of our national life.

In the making of a State, a Territory calls a convention, and frames a proposed State Constitution, which is submitted to Congress along with a petition for admittance. In doing this it is customary for this proposed State Constitution to declare the Constitution and laws of the United States to be its highest law. If Congress acts favorably, a new State comes into existence.

The law of each State consists of two parts—the Constitution and laws of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of the State. The second must not conflict with the first. The sovereign power is in the whole people. The power of general control has been delegated by the people to the general government, and the power of local control has been reserved to the several States. The Constitution and laws of the United States are the supreme law of the whole country, not only because the United States

is superior to the State, but also because the Constitution and laws of the United States are a part of the Constitution and laws of each State.

From this proper point of view the government of the United States is a very good illustration of that of the General Eldership. The original Elderships, those of East Pennsylvania, West Pennsylvania and Ohio, formed the General Eldership, in 1845, "by conceding to it the essentials of sovereignty." Since then the General Eldership forms the annual Elderships. That is, they can come into existence only by its authority. One of the Articles of the General Eldership's Constitution, the twenty-third, is as follows:

"The General Eldership shall have the exclusive right of establishing new Elderships, specifying their titles, and of altering and fixing the boundary lines of all the annual Elderships."

The General Eldership of 1905 added the following Amendment to this Article:

"Each Eldership thus established shall faithfully co-operate with the General Eldership, whose Charter and Constitution are the supreme rule of co-operation for all the Elderships. Any act, or article of incorporation of any annual Eldership, contrary to the provisions of the Gen-

eral Eldership Constitution, or to actions taken thereunder, or in pursuance thereof, is unconstitutional, and null and void."

From the foregoing Article and Amendment it is clear that the annual Eldership is subordinate to the General Eldership in all general matters. The annual Eldership has its local affairs, within the bounds of its own territory, which it manages according to its own Constitution and laws. This management is not to be interfered with except when it conflicts with the Constitution and laws of the General Eldership, in which case its actions are "null and void." An Eldership, like a State, has a two-fold law. It is governed by the Constitution and laws of the General Eldership, and also by its own Constitution and laws. And the latter must always be kept in harmony with the former.

The annual Elderships are on an equality, and it is a part of the polity of the General Eldership to see that this equality is respected. For example, the General Eldership provides (in Articles xxix, and xxx of its Constitution) that "All persons expelled from any given Eldership, or whose Certificates of Ordination have been surrendered, recalled, or annulled, shall be treated

as such by all the Elderships." And that "No preacher shall be transferred from one Eldership to another without mutual consent." Also (with certain exceptions which it specifies) that "No member of one Eldership shall remove into the territory of another Eldership or labor within its territory, without becoming a member of said Eldership and coming under its jurisdiction."

How the General Eldership Functions.

Every well regulated form of government has three fundamental functions: first, the law-making function; second, the law-interpreting function; third, the law-administering function. These we commonly speak of as the legislative, judicial and executive functions.

All three of these functions are found in the government of the General Eldership. The General Eldership can make laws, and it can also interpret and administer its laws. The legislative function it has wisely reserved exclusively to itself. The General Eldership alone has the power to make and change our general laws. The judicial and executive functions it has committed largely to its several boards.

The General Eldership meets but once in four years, and then for only a few days. This is often enough to make the changes that may be necessary in our laws, and hence the legislative function need not be exercised except by the General Eldership itself, in its quadrennial sessions. But it is not often enough for the application and execution of these laws, and so the judicial and executive functions have been committed by the General Eldership to its boards.

The boards which the General Eldership has provided for the carrying on of its work are the Board of Publication, the Board of Directors of the Publishing House, the Board of Missions (which has charge of both home and foreign missions), the Executive Board, the Board of Education, and the legal body, the Corporation, which consists of the Speaker, the Treasurer, the Journalizing Secretary, the Transcribing Secretary and the members of the Board of Publication, the Board of Missions, the Executive Board, and the Board of Education. Its function is to hold and control the property of the General Eldership.

Four of these boards, as well as the Corporation, represent the General Eldership specifically;

the Executive Board represents it generally, and more fully than any other board. It does such work as commonly comes to it, and also such work as cannot be done by the other boards. These four boards do not have much to do with the application or execution of our laws. They are elected to manage publishing, missionary and educational interests.

The Executive Board, on the other hand, largely exercises the judicial and executive functions of the General Eldership. For instance, it has, according to Article xii of the Constitution, "the right and power to remove from office, in case of misdemeanor or malfeasance in office, any of the officers or agents of the General Eldership, and to fill all vacancies which may occur." In order to do this it is necessary for the Executive Board to investigate the case, interpret and apply the law, and determine who may be guilty "of misdemeanor or malfeasance in office." In so doing, the Executive Board is exercising judicial functions. In removing the guilty one from office, it exercises executive functions.

This article was amended by the General Eldership of 1905 so as to extend the jurisdiction of the Executive Board "to all cases under the

Constitution not otherwise provided for," and to permit it to "act as a court of intermediate appeal in such other cases." In dealing with officials or agents of the General Eldership, the Executive Board inflicts the penalty for guilt. In dealing with other persons, "the judgment of the Board shall be certified to the annual Eldership of which the accused is a member, or to its Standing Committee" for appropriate action. The annual Eldership should, of course, report its actions in such cases to the Executive Board, that the General Eldership may in due time learn whether its jurisdiction and judgment have been properly regarded.

What is embodied in the foregoing amendment in general terms is stated more specifically in Article xxvii, which reads as follows:

"Section 1. All matters of controversy, difficulties and wrongs which may occur in any Eldership shall be investigated and settled by the proper tribunals thereof. And in all these cases the action of the Eldership having jurisdiction over the same shall be final, except when an appeal is taken from its decision to the General Eldership, or its Executive Board. And in that case notice thereof must be given to the President of the

Eldership and to appellee within thirty days after the trial of the case.

"Section 2. The Executive Board of the General Eldership shall be an intermediate court of appeal in such cases.

"Section 3. In no case shall it be deemed expedient or lawful for the members or tribunals of any other annual Eldership to interfere with such matters. And in case of such interference it shall be the duty of the General Eldership, or its Executive Board, to hear all complaints or charges that may be made, and if the same shall be sustained, said judgments shall be certified to the annual Eldership of which the accused is a member, or to its Standing Committee, which shall take suitable action in accordance therewith."

There are times when difficulties occur in an annual Eldership that are not satisfactorily settled, and from the decision of which an appeal is taken to the General Eldership. If this occurs shortly after a meeting of the General Eldership, these difficulties must remain in an unsettled condition for nearly four years, sometimes to the great detriment of the churches. The purpose of Sections 1 and 2 of the foregoing article is to

make the Executive Board "an intermediate court of appeal in such cases," in the hope that such difficulties may be settled at once.

Law, penalty, judgment and execution are the elements of true government. The General Eldership provides law. Sometimes it inflicts the penalties through its Executive Board, and in other cases this is left to the annual Elderships. In the first case the Executive Board must render judgment and execution, and in the second judgment only.

The General Eldership, in Article xxvi of its Constitution, gives its Executive Board original jurisdiction "in all controversies and difficulties arising between the members of any two or more annual Elderships." Provision is made for an appeal to be taken, in the usual way, from the decision of the Executive Board to the General Eldership.

The General Eldership long ago, in Article xxv, pledged itself to "assiduously guard against schisms in the churches and earnestly labor and pray for the promotion of Christian union, and harmony, and peace." The General Eldership in 1902, and again in 1905, amended this article so that section 2 now reads:

"That the method shall be, upon information of irregularities in teaching, practice, or polity, furnished by an Annual Eldership or its Standing Committee, or, in the absence of such official information, upon due information obtained otherwise, for the General Eldership, or its Executive Board, to express its judgment on matters thus brought before it, and require the Annual Eldership, or Elderships, involved to carry said judgment into effect."

This not only prescribes the method of procedure, but also authorizes the Executive Board to act, so as to prevent destructive schisms which might occur while waiting for the General Eldership to meet.

From what has been said it will be seen that the General Eldership has a form of government with all the elements necessary for its proper management and control; that its Constitution is not like the first "Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union Between the States," which formed but "a rope of sand." Instead of this we have, like the present government of the United States, laws and the power to enforce them.

This idea of government is not a new one. It has been in the Constitution from the beginning.

The first General Eldership, in 1845, after framing a Constitution substantially the same as our present one, adopted and signed the following resolution in order to ratify it:

"Resolved, That we, the undersigned ministers and bishops of the Church of God, being assembled in General Eldership, and having maturely considered and amended the several articles of the foregoing Constitution, do, for the declarative glory of God, for the good of his Church, for the better government of ourselves, and for the more efficient co-operation with each other, establish, confirm, ratify and adopt the same."

This was signed by the thirteen delegates present, the name of John Winebrenner heading the list. It shows that the provisions of the Constitution were intended for "government," as well as "co-operation."

The actions of the General Eldership, and the provisions of its Constitution, are reasonable and wise. Instead of despising government, we should respect it. Without it, neither the rights of individuals nor the protection of general interests can be assured. When law is properly respected and obeyed it prevents confusion and

promotes order; it commands confidence and encourages activity; it prevents wrong-doing and helps us "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In pointing out the principal methods by which our form of government is made operative, we have called attention to only a few of the thirty-three Articles that compose the Constitution of the General Eldership. The reason is, that most of these Articles deal with the ordinary duties of officers and agents of the General Eldership, and with such duties of its several boards as are easily understood, and which do not pertain primarily to our church polity. The only exception is the Executive Board, which has much to do in our general government. Quite a number of duties are specifically delegated to it, and in addition to these it is given jurisdiction over "all cases under the Constitution not otherwise provided for." That is, any case that cannot properly go before any other board or body must go before the Executive Board. It is also empowered to "act as a court of intermediate appeal in such other cases." The General Eldership has made its laws, but it is not in session to interpret, apply and execute them. This duty it has therefore del-

egated to its Executive Board, thus vesting it with both judicial and executive powers. And in this way our church government is in constant operation.

There is a sense in which we have personal and local interests, and sentimental preferences; but in the work of the General Eldership we must manifest equal concern for all of the interests, Elderships, churches and individuals within our borders. Our local success depends upon our general success. Our churches cannot prosper without the prosperity of our publishing, educational and missionary interests. The prosperity of these general enterprises depends upon the co-operation of the entire brotherhood according to the rules and regulations that govern us. The purpose of our constitutional provisions, therefore, is, as the framers of our first General Eldership Constitution broadly stated it, the glory of God and the good of his Church.

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